DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 295 482 FL 017 424

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TITLE Student-Inspired Revision.
PUB DATE 11 Mar 88
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (22nd, Chicago, IL, March 8-13, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Authors; Class Activities; Classroom Techniques; *English (Second Language); Imitation; Models; *Revision (Written Composition); Second Language Instruction; Student Motivation; Textbooks; Writing Exercises; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Russell (Bertrand)

ABSTRACT

A teacher of writing in English as a second language shares techniques and exercises that have inspired students to revise the rhetoric, vocabulary, and grammar of their own writing. They include: having students write about an unfamiliar classmate and having the classmate check the description for accuracy; distributing a model essay (Bertrand Russell's "What I Have Lived For" has worked particularly well) immediately after the first class essay is written; pairing students to write and exchange outlines on one of two topics (money or responsibility); comparison of commonly used introductions; providing students with essays giving a point of view opposed to their own, or additional relevant information about their topics; explaining the difference between connotation and denotation; discussing how to reword an emotional claim; explaining points of grammar, especially those that appear to be confusing students; making an analogy between writing and painting; setting an example by overtly reworking one's own writing; and showing the students successive drafts of works they have read, or works written and revised by other students. Convincing essays and articles about the revision process, geared to the student, are noted. (MSE)

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ED295482

STUDENT-INSPIRED REVISION

PAPER PRESENTED AT THE
TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL
CONVENTION OF
TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

Hyatt Hotel, Chicago, Illinois
March 11, 1988

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"Excuse me. Professor, can I have my paper back. There is something I want to change." These are the words I, and I imagine, many of you desire to hear. We, as educators, know the value of revising. But unfortunately, our students often still see it as an act of those who "couldn't get it right the first time." "Was it so bad that I have to do it again?" they ask. What we must therefore do is de-stigmatize the process of rewriting and instill in our students a genuine desire to revise, a desire that should come not from the teacher, not from their peers, but from inside themselves.

We must create situations where there is a natural inclination to revise, situations in which the students are not threatened. They should never feel that they are being personally attacked or that their weaknesses are being publicized. Most of the techniques I employ encourage the writer to revise before the instructor, or for that matter a fellow student, sees the work.

On the first day of class, when I want a fun activity that will provide a writing sample and encourage revision, I have the students choose as a

partner a classmate that they don't know. Then I ask each student to observe the other and to write a paragraph about him/her. I stress that I don't want a physical description. From their observation, they are to make assumptions about the other student's history, goals, habits, etc. After they have written for fifteen minutes, I have them read each others' writings and discuss the accuracy of each. Instinctively, the students upon hearing that the person they thought was from Japan is really from China, change and modify their work. They have automatically revised their writing without my having asked them to. I bring this to their attention and stress what a natural part of the writing process revision is. I then hand out an essay on revision to reinforce this notion.

The next way I impart the desire to revise is by distributing a model essay after the students have written their own essays. I withhold the model until after the students have written their own essays so that they will be less tempted to copy it. We all have witnessed our students' desire to imitate, to the point of plagiarism, a model essay we have distributed before they had formulated their own opinions. Like us all, our students are proud of their creations, often so

proud that they are reluctant to modify what they have written, especially if that necessitates omitting some of what has been written. However, this attachment to their own ideas seems to surface only after they have written those ideas down. So why not combine this reluctance to change with this desire to imitate, by withholding the "model" until after the students have written their own essays. What I'm suggesting is to use the model as an impetus to revise.

This technique has worked extremely well when I have used Bertrand Russell's essay "What I Have Lived For," reprinted in Bridges: Readings for Writers, Gorrell (Little Brown, 1985). Days before I present this essay to the students, I pose the question, "What do you live for?" Unfortunately, these days the answer is generally money, but one or two students will mention family obligations or God. We discuss the topic for an hour or so and then students with similar opinions group together. In groups of three, they come up with more support for their opinion and create an outline appropriate for a five-paragraph essay. Within the group, the outline should be basically the same, but for homework, each student writes his/her own essay following the outline or a modified version of it.

Of course, students who prefer writing without an outline may write the essay first and then outline it. What is important is that they bring both the essay and the outline to class. The next class, before collecting their essays, I hand out Russell's essay.

As you can see, it is a very organized and coherent essay. After discussing the content, the class analyzes the organization, which is quite explicit. I let them tell me that the introduction includes a clear statement of thesis, "Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind." The first body paragraph is on love, specifically on the results it has brought. The second body paragraph is on knowledge, and includes examples of that which he has sought to learn. The third body paragraph is on pity, his only unsought passion and the reasons for it. At this point I ask the students what they think of the essay. Most are impressed that this sophisticated essay is so simply organized. Some are depressed, comparing it mentally with their own essay on the same topic. And at least a few always ask if they can hand in their essays the following

day. This is what I long for. They have been inspired to revise their work without anyone else having read it.

To encourage other students, I continue the process. I ask the students to form pairs. The partners cannot have been in the same group the last class, nor can they have written on the same specific goal. That is, a person who has written on money should not pair up with another who has written on money, but rather should pair up with someone who has written on responsibility. Also, each must have both his/her essay and the outline s/he used. I ask them to retain their outlines and exchange their essays. I ask them then to read each other's essay and, without speaking, to outline it. When they are done, I ask them to exchange outlines. Then they compare the outline they had used to write the essay with the outline the reader created. "The reader's always right," I say. "If the outlines do not match, the writer has not been as clear as s/he should have been." As Quintilian said, "One should not aim at being possible to be understood, but impossible to be misunderstood." The reader and writer can discuss the essays at this point. When the reader indicates where s/he was confused, the writer often

modifies what s/he has written. Nevertheless, I don't collect the essays until the following day. My casual observation of my students' papers has shown that a lot of student-inspired revising takes place over that night.

The next class we again analyze the Russell essay, but this time only in terms of coherence. I let them discover the repetition of key words. [These words appear in boldface on the handout.] They are the words "passion," "life," "love," "knowledge," and "pity,". This brings to their attention the variety of word forms employed, "life," "living," and "live," for example in paragraph 5. Another coherence device, synonyms, used heavily in the second body paragraph, i.e. "understand," "know," and "apprehend" is usually noted then. The use of pronominal reference is also apparent, especially the use of "it" in the first body paragraph. We discuss the fact that using pronouns between paragraphs rather than within paragraphs might lead to confusion. Then they notice the transitions, "first," "next," and "finally," and the way with which Russell lets "first" do double duty, using it both to introduce the first effect and the first passion. At this point, I have the students examine the second

drafts of their essays for coherence devices. I give them class time to revise and those who desire more time submit their third drafts the next day. Thus, the students have revised their essays at least twice before I have even seen them.

Models are not the only way to encourage rhetorical revision. After our unit on the war on drugs, which included newspaper and magazine articles on the drug problem and Reagan's drug law, but before my lesson on effective introductions, I noticed that three-quarters of the essays began with virtually the same statement, "Today one of the biggest problems in American society is drug abuse." First I had the students read about various ways to make an introduction interesting and read examples of successful introductions. Then I asked them to listen as I read aloud the first sentence of every introduction of their essays. By the time I got to the seventh variation of "Nowadays, the U.S. has a big drug problem," the students began to laugh, but I kept reading. When I finished, one of the students put his hand out asking for his paper back. Others followed. I returned the papers and told them I would recollect them in fifteen minutes. When I did, I was rewarded with very creative introductions. My

favorite, which had originally began, "The abuse of illicit drugs is not a new problem to us," now read:

> 'Smoke, smoke, crack, marijuana' is perhaps the most popular and prevalent phrase you might encounter if you are walking on the streets of New York City. It might be an unforgettable experience if it was your first time in New York City but to millions of New Yorkers, it is so common that they have become immune to it. Yet something must be done about this drug craziness.

I also encouraged the students to revise the content of their drug essays by presenting them with a published essay expressing the opposing viewpoint. Most of my students' drug essays suggested strong government actions. To encourage them to strengthen their argument by refuting the opposition I distributed an essay by Gore Vidal entitled "Drugs" (reprinted in Reading into Writing, Gould (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983) which argues for the legalization of drugs. He claims that all drugs should be legalized and their effects, negative and positive, clearly marked. To do otherwise, he argues, is a violation of our right to pursue happiness. In his essay, Vidal chastises the public, and thus his readers, for having "no memory of anything that happened before last Tuesday." and discusses the disastrous effects of Prohibition. When the students see their ideas

being so dismissed, some of them want "revenge". Without a word from me, they incorporate into their essays concessions concerning prohibition, usually ones which claim that it is not an analogous situation because unlike alcohol, crack kills. Two other controversial essays on this timely topic are: Milton Friedman's "Prohibition & Drugs" reprinted in Refining Composition Skills, Smalley and Ruetten (New York: Macmillan, 1986) which cites the failure of Prohibition to end drinking in the 1920's and Goldstein's "Give Drugs to Addicts so we can be Safe" reprinted in Steps in Composition, 3rd ed., Troyka and Nudelman (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1982). Supplying the opposing point of view, especially after having discussed the power of grammatical concessions, often inspires students to revise the content of their essays.

If an opposing point of view is not applicable or available, we can provide the students with additional relevant data about their topic. For instance, my unit on prisons, which included viewing part of the Constitution series on Channel 13, reading part of Jack Abbots In the Belly of the Beast, reading various articles on viable alternatives to incarceration, reading Bernard Malamud's short story entitled "The Prison", and

doing a role play on a prison uprising ended a week before trouble at a New York prison on Riker's Island began. In fact, the day after my students' essays were due, New York City's Mayor Koch made the suggestion that ferry boats be used to ease the overcrowding of our city jails. Articles which appeared on this and others on the outbreak of violence at Riker's Island gave my students more ammunition for their essays on prison reform. I simply handed out the articles as optional readings. And lo and behold, a few of the students mentioned ferries as a way to ease our overcrowded correctional facilities and one actually quoted a prison guard at Riker's Island. By simply supplying optional readings, I had encouraged the students to rewrite their essays in order to incorporate some of the information given.

The techniques I've mentioned so far inspire students to revise for content or rhetoric. We can, of course,encourage students to rewrite their papers to improve the verbal expression. One of the ways I encourage the use of synonyms is to read aloud part of a student essay, using it as a post-writing model. I had great luck with this when I read the introduction of a student essay on prison reform, which unlike many others in the

class, did not repeat the word "prison" over and over. When I read the introduction in which the student had successfully incorporated "imprisonment," "incarceration," "jail," "correctional facility," and even "immurement," all words which had appeared in this unit's readings, I noticed some of the students jotting down the words and later I read those words in those students' essays. They had obviously revised to incorporate them.

Another way to encourage lexical revision is to explain to the class as a whole, without pointing a finger at anyone, the difference between connotation and denotation and why it is not effective to argue for euthanasia by calling it "killing the elderly".

If your students have not yet learned that some phrases are allowable, and even common, in spoken English, but not in written English, you might want to encourage them to modify their style by comparing the two. In the textbook <u>The Ways of Written English</u>, Inturrisi (New York: Language Innovations, 1984) a paragraph on capital punishment that sounds like a transcribed monologue is contrasted with a more appropriate written version. The difference is striking. The chatty

paragraph begins, ""I think capital punishment is bad. It's like playing god or something. Look, it doesn't really stop the crimes, right? So why do it?" and is contrasted with "Punishing and killing criminals may make a society feel secure, but they do not stop crimes. People sometimes persuade themselves that they can play god. Capital punishment, however, is still killing another human being: therefore, it can never have moral or legal justification."

If you want to encourage your students' to increase the objectivity of their essays, you might want to spend some class time showing the students how to reword an emotional claim. Nice exercises exist on this in A Practical Guide for Advanced Writers in English as a Second Language, Munsell and Clough (New York: Macmillan, 1984). It has a mock debate between a husband and wife on the benefits and/or detriments of television. The students are shown how a subjective claim, such as " I just can't believe these kids of the TV generation. They're like zombies! They can't even carry on a conversation." becomes more objective, and thus convincing, when reworded: "Children who grow up constantly watching TV are less likely to develop their conversational and other social

skills." Students laugh at the subjective statements, esp. "[TV watchers]' bodies get flabby, their brains turn to mush, and their social skills disappear entirely." and have fun rewording them. And perhaps because they do not want fellow students to laugh at their own work, they comb their essays for any instances of subjectivity, and when they find them, they revise.

Grammatical revision seems to be the most practiced form of revision and is generally brought about by the instructor's introduction of a grammatical point which the students have not yet learned or at least not yet mastered. However, if this is done as a classroom activity as opposed to individual error correction, it does not berate or belittle the students in any way. Rather it encourages them to analyze and modify what they have written. On the higher levels, grammatical revision has most often occurred after I have taught lessons on: restrictive versus nonrestrictive relative clauses; real versus unreal conditionals; and parallelism. Since most of us are familiar with this technique, let one example suffice. Reading the first drafts of my students' essays on the adverse effects of television, I noticed a confusion about relative clauses. I

explained that by including commas in the sentence, "Children, who watch a lot of television, may have a distorted view of reality," they were making one very strong claim, i.e. that all children watch a great deal of television; and one very weak claim, i.e. that for no given reason, children may have a distorted perception of reality. Without commas, however, the sentence would mean that young heavy-television viewers would have a distorted perception of reality due to their viewing habits. When the difference in meaning was explained, many students requested their papers back so that they could change the claims they were making by modifying the grammatical structure.

Thus through the systematic introduction of relevant rhetorical models, additional data, and new grammatical constructions, we can set up situations in which it is natural for our students to revise without being instructed to do so. This is, of course, more likely to happen if we establish an environment conducive to revision, an environment in which revision is the norm.

One of the most effective ways is to convince our students of the benefits of revision is to share with them the literature that has convinced us. This is especially helpful with those students

who only believe what the instructor says after they see those views expressed in printed form. The essay you present may be any one which convincingly portrays the effectiveness of revision. It may be the actual one which "sold you" on revising, though some of those must be adapted if they are too instructor oriented.

There are also many effective essays that are geared to the student. Two such essays appear in Bridges: Readings for Writers, Gorrell (Little Brown, 1985). One, "The Maker's Eye: Revising your own Manuscripts," by Murray, supports the need for revision by quoting famous writers such as Tolstoy, Bradbury, and Burgess, who admits that he "might revise a page 20 times." The second essay, "Theme Writing" by Fisher, uses analogies to stress the importance of revising. It equates a first draft with warm-up practice for a pitcher and further suggests that handing in an unrevised essay is like handing someone "a lot of sticks and boards bunched together with string and call[ing] it a table."

Other obvious analogies include painting. Revising, I tell my students, is like a painter stepping back from his/her painting and examining the work before adding the next brush strokes.

Using this analogy, The Random House Writing Course for ESL Students, Tucker and Costello (New York: Random House, 1985) includes Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein, informing us that Picasso asked her to pose eighty or ninety times and that he changed the composition even as he painted. When the analogy is apt it helps students realize that revising is not the invention of a sadistic ESL instructor, but rather a common phenomenon. This particular example also serves to highlight the great advantage that written revision has over visual revision. It is obvious to a viewer of Picasso's portrait of Stein that it had been reworked many times: the face looks like a mask. However, when a student submits the final version of an essay, no one knows if it is the first version or the two-hundredth.

Too many of our students equate revision with punishment. Perhaps, we ourselves have inadvertently maligned the concept of revision by excusing those students whose papers are good (or good enough) from having to revise their work. Far too many students believe that if they had done a good enough job the first time, they wouldn't have to do it again.

To show students that revising is part of the process of writing (as well as thinking) I revise often and occasionally do so in front of them. On my syllabus, I have a parenthetical note at the end which states that this is the third revision of the syllabus - a note which seems to make many students smile. Moreover, when I am writing on the board, I frequently stand back, reread what I have written, erase, augment, or modify some of what I had written. When I comment on a student's paper I also overtly revamp what I have written. If we instructors never seem to revise, how can we expect our students to believe our claim that revising is part of the process of writing.

Another way to remove the stigma from revision is by sharing with the students drafts of works they have read. You can show them either drafts of your own work, drafts from student papers that had showed great progress and whose final draft you had shared with the class, or drafts of student essays reprinted in textbooks. This technique is most effective when the students have read the final draft and exclaimed, "I could never write like that." Showing them the first draft and letting them identify the areas of weakness serves to illustrate the fact that the work they are not yet

satisfied with can be developed into an effective essay. The text Student Writers at Work and in the Company of Other Writers: The Bedford Prizes, Sommers and McQuade (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986) includes drafts of several student essays which have won the Bedford Prize. Placed side by side are the first and final drafts of a student essay entitled "A Tribute to My Father" along with comments by the author on why and how she revised. In addition, there are two drafts of a prize-winning essay on seasickness and two of a prize-winning essay on horror films, both followed by questions on the reasons for revision. In Critical Reading and Writing for Advanced ESL Students, Scull (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1987), drafts of student essays are followed by actual dialogues from student-instructor conferences. For an essay on smoking in the workplace, the original draft, a transcript of the conference, and a marked-up draft are included. For the next essay on prisons, only the first draft and the recreated student-teacher dialogue are given. The student is asked to create the next draft based on comments from the conference. Writing Strategies for ESL Students, Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1983) explains in great detail the trial and error

process a writer went through elaborating an outline-like rough draft into an effective 5 paragraph essay on the benefits of having sheep dogs protect sheep. Within the unit, there is also a step-by-step narrated revision paring down a very informative yet unbalanced 10-paragraph essay on the history of segregated baseball. Shorter student examples on The Teapot Dome Scandal and a black girl's resentment about having received a black doll for Christmas are given in Strategic Writing, Bloom (New York: Random House, 1983) which categorizes their student examples into "revising an intro.", "revising to moderate a biased tone," "revising for clearer focus and emphasis," and "revising to improve verbal expression." Five drafts of an essay on male-female inequality in marriage are featured in Active Writing, Robinson and Modrey (New York: Macmillan, 1986). The drafts are the original one, one on reorganizing (which shows areas of weakness, but no solutions), one on deleting(where they actually do delete), one on adding(which only indicates areas) and then the polished version.

Early drafts of famous writings also work well. Note how many people flock to museums to see the original manuscripts of such a writer as

Shakespeare. There are such examples in various textbooks. A rough draft of Vladimir Nabokov's, for instance, appears in The Random House Writing Course, Tucker and Costello (New York: Random House, 1985). Publishers' uncorrected galleys, especially of well-known books, are another good way to visually explain that virtually every writer revises. Anecdotal evidence bears this out. Dylan Thomas rewrote his poem, "Fern Hill" 200 times (Writing Strategies for ESL, Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1983). Moliere read his plays to his cook and altered and amended them until the cook understood (Writing Prose, Kane and Peters, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). Students seem pleased to hear that prize-winning author Mary Gordon's first novel, Final Payments was rejected by many publishing companies until Elizabeth Hardwick, Mary's instructor at Barnard College, suggested she revise it, and change it from third person to first. It was then acclaimed by the critics and public alike.

Writers who do not revise are rare. Exceptions help prove the rule. At the New York Review of Books, the only author who does not revise is Stanley Hoffmann, the Chairperson of the Center for European Studies of Harvard. He writes

his article longhand on a legal pad once and it is published as is, but never without the entire staff commenting on what a rarity this is, especially since his native tongue is French.

To reiterate, in our classrooms we must foster a positive attitude toward revision. We can do so by assigning relevant readings, by making apt analogies, by overtly reworking our own writing, by directing our students' attention to published revisions, and by sharing convincing anecdotes. When we have done such, we will have the best environment in which to create situations where there is a natural inclination to revise. By de-stigmatizing the process of revising and nurturing their own impulse to improve their work, we will have instilled in our students a genuine desire to revise and thus achieved our goal of student-inspired revision.

HANDOUT

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March 11, 1988

Inspiring the Student to Revise

I. Creating Situations Where There is a Natural Inclination to Revise
  A. Encouraging Rhetorical Revision by Using Post-Writing Models
    1. Organization & Coherence: Bertrand Russell's "What I Have Lived For" in Bridges: Readings for Writers, Gorrell (Boston: Little Brown, 1985) -- reverse side of this sheet
    2. Introductions
  B. Encouraging Thematic Revision by Supplying Content
    1. Accurate Data to Show Up Inaccuracies
    2. Additional (Earlier Unavailable) Data
    3. Opposite Viewpoint: Friedman's "Prohibition and Drugs" in Refining Composition Skills, Smalley and Ruetten (New York: Macmillan, 1986) or:
       Goldstein's "Give Drugs To Addicts So We Can Be Safe" in Steps in Composition 3rd ed., Troyka and Nudelman (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1982) or:
       Vidal's "Drugs" in Reading Into Writing, Gould (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983)
  C. Encouraging Lexical Revision by Discussing Word Choice
    1. Synonyms
    2. Connotation versus Denotation
    3. Spoken versus Written Style: re: Capital Punishment in The Ways of Written English, Inturrisi (New York: Language Innovations, 1984)
    4. Subjective versus Objective: re: Television in A Practical Guide for Advanced Writers in English as a Second Language, Munsell and Clough (New York: Macmillan, 1984)
  D. Encouraging Grammatical Revision by Introducing New Constructions
    1. Restrictive versus Nonrestrictive Clauses

II. Establishing an Environment Conducive to Revising
  A. Sharing the Literature that Convinced Us
  B. Reading Writers' Writings on Revision
    1. Murray's "The Maker's Eye: Revising Your Own Manuscripts" in Bridges: Readings for Writers, Gorrell (Boston: Little Brown, 1985) and Active Writing, Robinson and Modrey (New York: Macmillan, 1986)
    2. Fisher's "Theme Writing" Bridges: Readings for Writers, Gorrell (Boston: Little Brown, 1985)
  C. Using Apt Analogies
  D. Overtly Revising in front of the Students
  E. Examining the Drafts of Successful Student Essays
    1. "A Tribute to My Father," "The Sea and Me," and "Look Out Behind You!" in Student Writers at Work and in the Company of Other Writers: The Bedford Prizes, Sommers and McQuade (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986)
    2. "Smoking: A Hot Issue" and "Punishment" in Critical Reading & Writing for Advanced ESL Students, Scull (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1987)
    3. "Bring Back the Sheepdog" and "The Years of Segregated Baseball" in Writing Strategies for ESL Students, Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1983)
    4. Various Short Revisions of Introduction, Tone, Focus and Diction in Strategic Writing, Bloom (New York: Random House, 1983)
    5. "Unequal Partners" in Active Writing, Robinson and Modrey (New York: Macmillan, 1983)
  F. Examining the Drafts of Published Works
    1. Museum Manuscripts
    2. Textbook Examples: Vladimir Nabokov's 3 sentences in The Random House Writing Course for ESL Students, Tucker and Costello (New York, Random House, 1985)
    3. Publishers' Uncorrected Galleys
    4. Revision Suggestions for Future Editions of Textbooks Bridges: Readings for Writers, Gorrell (Boston: Little Brown, 1985)
  G. Sharing Convincing Anecdotes

DAY ONE

1. Class brainstorms on "What do you live for?"

2. Class breaks into small groups with similar thoughts to brainstorm some more and create a working outline.

3. At home, each student writes his/her own essay, roughly based on the group outline. (With their essay they must hand in an outline.)

DAY TWO

4. Instructor does <u>not</u> collect essays.

5. Class reads Russell's essay aloud and analyzes it in terms of organization.

6. Class outlines Russell's essay.

7. Student exchanges own essay (minus outline) with partner (who must have been in a different group the day before).

8. Student outlines partner's essay.

9. Student checks partner's outline with his/her own outline.

10. At home or in class, with or without the aid of a partner, student revises the organization of his/her essay.

DAY THREE

11. Class returns to Russell's essay and analyzes it in terms of coherence, underlining repetitions, circling synonyms, bracketing pronouns, and starring transitional phrases. Paragraph hooks are pointed out.

12. Student does the same to his/her own essay. (Can show irrelevance as well as incoherence.)

13. Student revises essay, concentrating on coherence.

14. Student submits third draft of essay.